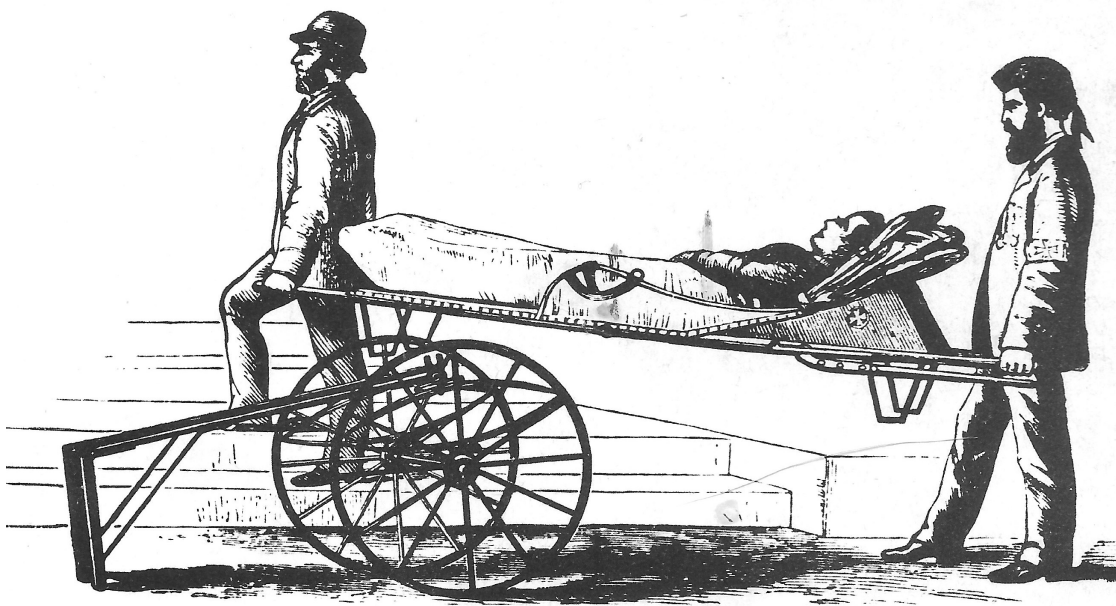


Hiram Syson

The First Ambulance Man



The story of Crimean War veteran Hiram Syson who operated the Order of St John's first public ambulance service in Burslem, Staffordshire, from 1874.

Alan J Sharkey

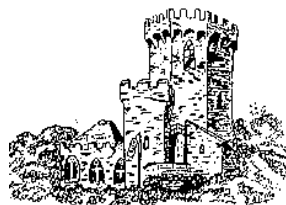
Cover picture – Hiram Syson with the Neuss ambulance litter imported by the Order of St John from the Berlin Carriage Works and used by Hiram Syson at Burslem from 1874. Picture courtesy of the Museum of the Order of St John, Clerkenwell, as shown in the 1877-1977 Centenary booklet. This and another image also appear in James Gildea's 1881 publication "The Order of St John of Jerusalem in England and the St John Ambulance Association" – see Appendix A.

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The First Ambulance Man

Alan J Sharkey

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Introduction

Hiram Syson ran the Order of St John's first ambulance, at Burslem in Staffordshire from 1874, more than three years before the formation of the Order of St John's teaching branch – the St John Ambulance Association – and thirteen years before the operational uniformed St John Ambulance Brigade. He was the second ever Serving Brother (the first was the London caretaker) - the first Serving Brothers were working servants of the Order.

In 1872 Hiram started work as caretaker of the town hall in Burslem and in March 1874 installed at the town hall the Order of St John's first ambulance. He was given training in the application of splints and tourniquets before the concept emerged of teaching 'first aid' to lay people. The Order of St John provided an ambulance litter housed at the town hall and Hiram Syson, wearing the brassard of the Order, operated an ambulance service on behalf of the Order. It was the first example in England of the operation of an organised and trained ambulance service for the civilian population.

The implementation of the ambulance service was reported in the Annual Reports of the Order of St John during the 1870's and referenced by N Corbet Fletcher in his 'Annals' but very little has been recorded about Hiram Syson and his family. My own interest was aroused when I discovered that Hiram married Eliza in my home town of Whittlesey, a small market town in the Fens, near Peterborough where Hiram was stationed when serving in the army after the Crimean War. The full story of Hiram Syson, an enterprising and popular man, has never been told before and I hope that this little booklet goes some way to filling some gaps in this part of the history and origins of the ambulance movement!

Hiram Syson

The First Ambulance Man

Hiram Syson, destined to be England's first ambulance-man, was born in Derbyshire on 22 February 1833. His father Isaac was an agricultural labourer. By 1841 the family – Isaac, his wife Elizabeth, Hiram and siblings John (12), Hannah (10), Ruth (4) and Ann (3) were living at Wollaton near Nottingham.



The Crimea medal with four bars as awarded to Hiram Syson

In 1851 at the age of eighteen Hiram left home to enlist with the 47th Regiment of Foot at Coventry. By September 1854, now with the 57th Regiment of Foot (The Die-Hards) he had embarked for service in the Crimean War. The Regiment landed in Crimea on 14 September 1854 and fought at the Battle of Alma on 20 September 1854, then at Balaklava on 25 October 1854, and Inkerman on 5 November 1854 as part of the 4th Infantry Division commanded by Lieutenant General Sir George Cathcart. 2541 Private Syson was decorated with the Crimean War medal with bars for Alma, Balaklava and Inkerman. He probably later received a bar for Sebastopol for service over the winter of 1854/55. In June 1856 the regiment moved to Malta and then sailed for India to help suppress the Indian Rebellion in May 1858 but it is likely that Hiram returned to the UK in 1856. By 1859 Hiram was stationed in Peterborough.

In January 1860 Hiram (then twenty-six years old) married twenty years old

Eliza Timms¹ of Whittlesey. Eliza, born in the autumn of 1839, was the eldest of ten children all born in Whittlesey to John Timms² (born in Ivy Lane Whittlesey) and Elizabeth Meggott, married at St Marys Whittlesey on 5 June 1838. Eliza was born at Thoroughfare Yard in Whittlesey (a small lane that runs next to Broad Street School and connects Broad Street with Church Street). By 1843 the family had moved to High Causeway and then by 1851 they were living in Inhams End.

In about 1857 the Timms family, other than Eliza and her younger brother Charles (born 1843) moved to Hareholme, near Newchurch in Rossendale, Lancashire, where John obtained work at the Hareholme Cotton Mill. Maureen Slater (a Timms family cousin) tells how:

"Life must have been incredible hard for them and many other people in Whittlesey and then a breakthrough when people were required to work in other parts of the country a Council Man would arrive at Whittlesey Market Place about 5 am in the morning where a large group of men were waiting and the Council Chap would select a few men and their families for guaranteed work in another part of England".

So John, Elizabeth and seven of their children moved to Lancashire leaving Eliza and her brother Charles ³ in Whittlesey.

Eliza and Hiram's daughter Ruth, destined to be an only child, was born in Whittlesey on 7 April 1860. The 1861 census shows that Hiram was still serving as a private soldier with the 57th Foot and he, Eliza and Ruth were living in Church Street, Peterborough. At some time during the period 1861 to 1870 he was promoted corporal, a fact that with his military service no doubt helped him find subsequent employment.

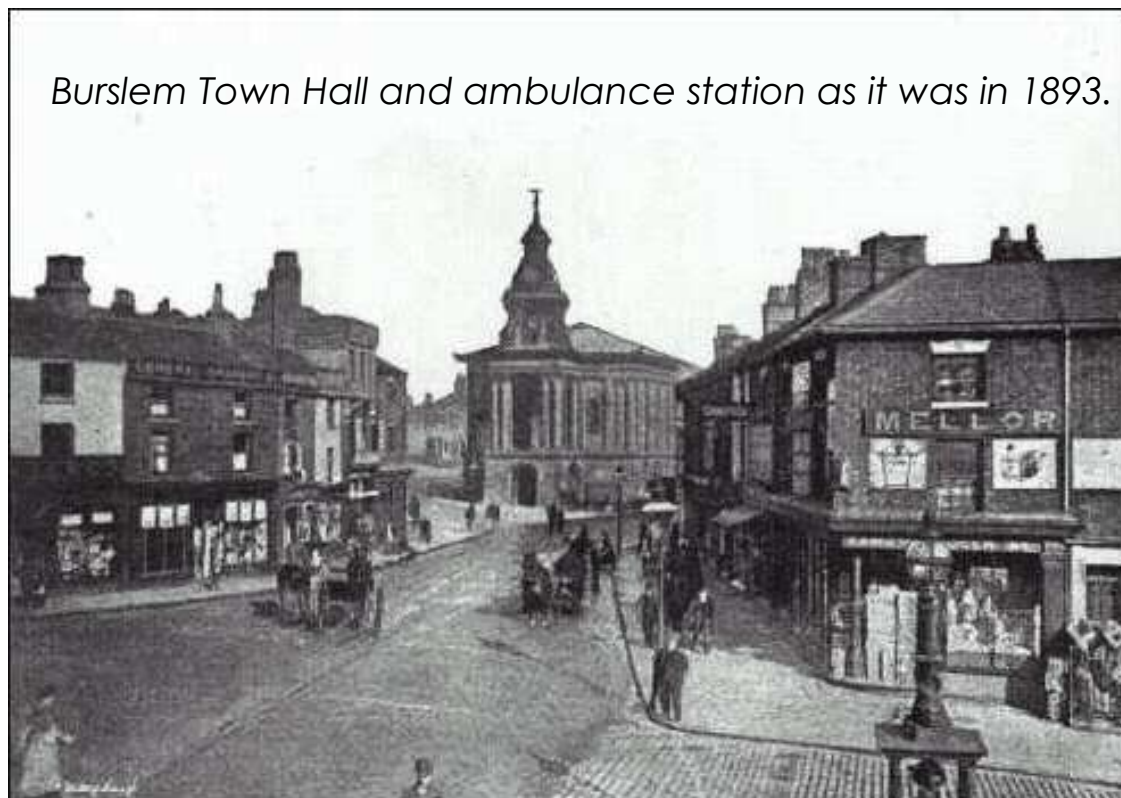
¹ There were three Eliza Timms living in Whittlesey in 1860 – the other two

² Also spelt Tims.

³ Charles was inducted into the Royal Navy as a Boy 1st Class on 28 May 1860.

In about 1870 Hiram left the army and obtained employment with the London and North Western Railway as a railway pointsman. At the time of the 1871 census Hiram, Eliza and Ruth were living at Whitmore Station in Staffordshire.

In 1872 an opportunity arose for the employment of a new hall-keeper at the town hall in Burslem, Staffordshire. The Staffordshire Advertiser of 7 December 1872 reported that the Board of Health received forty applications, of which five were selected for recommendation to the Board *“whose choice ultimately fell upon Mr and Mrs Hiram Syson of Whitmore, and they were appointed at a salary of £60 a year⁴”*.



It was in 1872 that the Order of St John was seeking suitable purpose for its charitable activities. The idea of *“setting on foot an ambulance service, for the conveyance to the hospitals of sick and injured persons”⁵* was scuppered by medical opinion. The Order's Annual Report for 1872 continues:

⁴ £5230 in today's money.

⁵ Order of St John Annual Report 1872.

"The opinion of Mr FC Skey, the senior Surgeon of St Bartholomew's Hospital, and that of other surgical authorities, was consulted, and the difficulties in the way of an adequate and successful adoption of the scheme appeared so great that, on the recommendation of the Almoner, the Chapter General abandon it for the present".

The idea did not go away. The Order's 1874 Annual Report says:

"An Ambulance system for the mining and colliery districts, the establishment of which has long occupied the attention of the Chapter, has been commenced, and has been already highly appreciated."

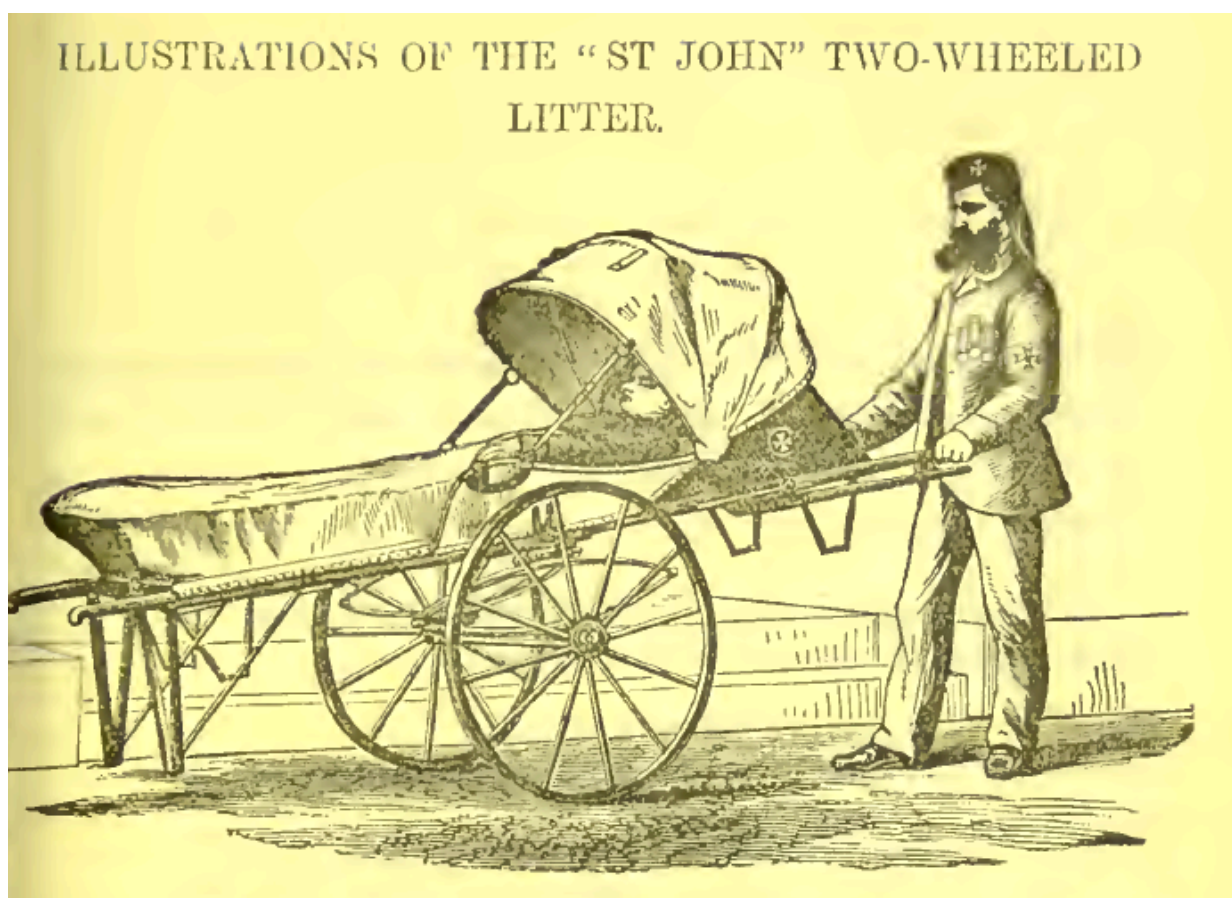
"After consulting Mr Manley VC and Professor Longmore, the Chapter decided upon purchasing two of the wheeled litters similar to those used in the Franco-Prussian War, made by Messrs Neuss, the Royal Carriage Builders, at Berlin. One of these has been stationed at Burslem, in Staffordshire, in the centre of a large population employed in the coal mines and potteries, where, through the zealous exertions of our confrere Colonel Shaw, a local committee has been formed, who have undertaken the entire expense of housing the ambulance and maintaining it in repair, as well as the pay of a Serving Brother (who, when on duty, will wear a 'brassard' with the badge of the Order) to look after and convey it to the scene of accidents."

"The following resolution, unanimously adopted at a meeting of the Local Board of Health at Burslem, on the 3rd of June last, has been transmitted through Colonel Shaw, to the Secretary:-

"Resolved – That the Board cheerfully undertakes to provide accommodation in the Town Hall for the ambulance litter, which has been provided for the town of Burslem by the Order of St John of Jerusalem, and, on behalf of the inhabitants, thanks the Order for

what they feel assured will meet a great want in a district where mining and other accidents are prevalent”.

“The charge of the ambulance, and its direction in case of accidents, has been placed by the Local Board of Health at Burslem, in the hands of their Hall Keeper, Mr Hiram Syson, late Corporal in the 57th Regiment, who was for some time a hospital orderly when serving in the Crimea. It is recommended by Colonel Shaw that he should be appointed a Serving Brother of the Order”.



Hiram Syson pictured with the Neuss ambulance litter in about March 1874. Illustration taken from James Gildea's 1881 publication.

The formal appointment of Hiram Syson as a Serving Brother of the Order took effect on 3 November 1874. He was the second ever Serving Brother, the first was the London

caretaker (the first Serving Brothers were working servants of the Order).

Corbet Fletcher in his Annals for 15th March 1873⁶ describes how an:

"Ambulance Service initiated this day by The Order of St. John, through the efforts of Surgeon-Major (afterwards Surgeon- General) William George Nicholas Manley, VC of the Royal Artillery, who contributed £100 towards the expenses which were met by private enterprise. As part of this Service, the first Ambulance Stations were established in Staffordshire amidst a large population employed in mines and potteries at Burslem on 15th March, 1874⁷, and at Wolverhampton in 1874. Each station was equipped with a two-wheeled litter as used in the Prussian Army, and other ambulance material, and staffed by a trained ex-Army orderly. The Burslem Station was the more successful, and was established at the Town Hall in the charge of Hiram Syson, late Corporal of the 57th ⁸ Regiment, who was admitted to The Order as the second Serving Brother on 3rd November, 1874; and the Wolverhampton Station was at the local hospital. This Service was still flourishing when in 1877 the Association was founded".

So Hiram Syson ran the Order of St John's first ambulance service, at Burslem, from 1874, three years before the formation of the St John Ambulance Association and thirteen years before the St John Ambulance Brigade.

Once appointed Hiram was keen to advertise his services. Under the heading "The Ambulance" the Staffordshire Sentinel of 11 June 1874 reported:

⁶ This was an error and should be 1874 as reported in the 1874 Annual Report of the Order of St John.

⁷ Corrected – the original says 1873, There is no mention of ambulance activity or Hiram Syson in the 1873 Annual Report but the 1875 Annual Report suggests the first use was on 9 June 1874.

⁸ Misquoted as 37th Regiment.

"On Monday evening a young man, who had received some injury in a boat, was conveyed to the Infirmary in a common cart. We are requested to state that had application been made to Mr Hiram Syson, serving brother⁹ of the Order of St John, the man may have been taken in the ambulance placed in the Town Hall, by the Order of St John of Jerusalem, for the general benefit of sick or injured persons".

The Order's 1875 Annual Report includes a table describing the use of the ambulance litter over the period 1 June 1874 to 31 May 1875. This seems to reflect the first nine incidents, the earliest of which was on 9 June 1874.

The first newspaper report of the use of the ambulance litter by Hiram was in the Staffordshire Sentinel of 23 November 1874 when the litter was used to transport a woman who broke her leg in two places to the North Staffordshire Infirmary. This is reflected in the table in the 1875 Annual Report shown below with the newspaper clip.

The 1875 Annual Report mentions that Hiram who was *"voluntarily receiving instruction in the use of splints and tourniquets has proved himself most zealous and efficient and has much pride in his connection with the Order as one of its Serving Brothers and Ambulanciers."* The Annual Report says *"As a mark of approval and encouragement to further exertion, the Chapter has recently awarded him a small gratuity"*.

In June 1875 Hiram was appointed superintendent of the Burslem, Longport and Cobridge Fire Brigade. The Staffordshire Sentinel of 5 August 1875 reported how, when a woman died lying in bed when her mattress caught fire, *"Mr Syson of the Burslem Fire Brigade was on the spot with the Burslem fire engine, but by the time the engine arrived, its services, happily, were not needed"*.

⁹ Serving Brother in practice if not yet formally appointed!

REPORT OF AMBULANCE STATIONED AT TOWN HALL, BURSLEM,

From 1st June, 1874, to 31st May, 1875.

Date.	Patients.		Conveyed		Time, Hours.	Hurt or Sick.	Distance, Miles.	Nature of Hurts.
	Male.	Female	From	To				
1874. June 9	1	—	Bethel Chapel . . .	13, Albert St.	1	H	1	Severely shaken by a fall from Scaffold
„ 22	1	—	Ry. Station, Burslem	Smallthorn	1½	H	1½	Broken Leg.
Nov. 5	1	—	Albert Street . . .	Commercial St.	¾	H	¾	„ „
„ 22	—	1	Clarence St., Longport	Hart's Hall Infirmary	4	H	5	„ „
Dec. 10	1	—	Play Ground . . .	Town Hall and Chapel Lane	½	H	½	„ „
„ 17	1	—	Newcastle Street .	Brindley Street	1	H	1	Crushed Ankle.
1875. Feb. 19	1	—	Town Hall . . .	Lyndhurst St.	1½	H	½	Broken Leg.
May 22	—	1	Sand Street, Burslem	Hart's Hill Infirmary	4	S	5	Dropsical after Confinement.
„ 22	1	—	Union St., Burslem	„ „	4	H	5	Broken Leg.

The time given in this Statement includes the whole interval occupied, not only in the conveyance of the Patient, but also in going from and returning to the Town Hall, and in some cases in waiting for a medical man.

The table in the 1875 Annual Report detailing the first cases managed by Hiram Syson,

BURSLEM.
FROST ACCIDENT.—On Saturday night a woman named Mary Hargreaves, wife of a labourer at Longport, was returning home from Burslem market, when she slipped down on some ice and broke her leg in two places. Mr. Syson, Brother of the order of St. John of Jerusalem, was communicated with, and he removed her in the ambulance supplied by the order (with the assistance of a police constable) to the North Staffordshire Infirmary. The husband of the woman broke his leg a few months ago, and as only just been discharged from the Infirmary.

The Staffordshire Sentinel report of 23 November 1874.

Carter William Fox met with an accident in August 1875 going down Porthill when the wheels of the vehicle he was driving crushed the ankle of his left leg. He was immediately taken to the nearest licensed premises where he was examined by a surgeon. *"Subsequently he was removed to his own house at Tunstall in the ambulance, under the charge of Bro. Syson of the Order of St John of Jerusalem."*¹⁰

On 30 November 1875 *"it was decided to grant Mr Syson, the hall keeper, an increase of £15 per year in his salary. Mr Tennant spoke in commendatory terms of Mr Syson's services and said that the work Mr Syson had to do had increased very considerably since his appointment to the post."*¹¹

On 10 December 1875 Hiram, now a well respected man, was initiated into the Burslem Sutherland Lodge of Freemasons, his occupation described as "Town Hall Keeper".

A major fire broke out on 6 February 1876 in a manufacturing business behind the District Bank in Burslem. The fire was discovered shortly before nine o'clock. Hiram immediately got the firemen together and arrived at the scene at ten past nine.

"The hose was fixed to a plug in the Market Square, taken down a narrow road which runs between the District Bank and Hope and Carter's manufactory. And the water was soon brought to play on one side of the premises. Assistance was willingly rendered, and every effort made to extinguish the conflagration. But it continued to spread, and had it not been for the judicious treatment adopted by Mr. Syson, the whole place would have been destroyed, and the District Bank would have been placed in imminent danger. The brigade were, however, equal to the occasion, and after the engine had been at work a short time, Mr. Syson felt certain of his ability to subdue the fire, so that it was not considered necessary to send for the Hanley and Tunstall fire engines.

¹⁰ Staffs Sentinel 1 September 1875.

¹¹ Staffs Sentinel 2 December 1875

*The men continued their exertions until between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, when the engine was sent away, there being no longer any need for its use. The men, however, remained until five o'clock."*¹²

A letter in the Staffordshire Sentinel of 3 April 1876 said"

"At Burslem there is an ambulance, which is frequently in use to take wounded persons to the Infirmary. It was supplied, I believe, by the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, but I am afraid that Bro. Syson, who has charge of it, does not find his task very remunerative. Mr. Syson is kindly disposed, attentive to his duties, civil and obliging, and any words of mine that can induce the good people of Burslem to requite him for his services, I shall be glad. I would at the same time suggest that each of the other towns in the Potteries obtain one of these ambulances, as they are light, durable, and fairly comfortable."

Saturday 22 February 1879 was the occasion of Hiram Syson's forty-sixth birthday. To celebrate the event an address was presented to Hiram by the firemen of Burslem, Longport and Cobridge. The event was recorded in the Staffordshire Sentinel of 1 March 1879:

"Presentation. On Saturday evening the following address was presented to the Superintendent of the Burslem, Cobridge, and Longport Fire Brigades: "We, the undersigned members of the fire brigades, beg most respectfully to tender a small tribute of respect to you, Mr. Syson, on the occasion of your forty-sixth birthday; but more especially in commemoration of your kind and gentlemanly bearing, firmness and discretion on all emergencies, which have endeared you to us, and enabled us to execute your orders with right good will. We respect you for the efficiency and patience you have at ail times displayed in the discharge of your onerous task of teaching us our service and duty; and we respect you for the generosity you have manifested

¹² Staffs Sentinel 7 February 1876.

towards us many occasions, and we one and all feel most grateful to you. Hoping you will accept this small present, which will be presented to you in remembrance of your forty-sixth birthday, and trusting and hoping you will live to command many years, with the right hearty good wishes of your devoted servants, John Holdcroft, James Edwards, James Gracie, Thomas Hackney, Thomas Green, John Key, Ephraim Hancock, William Harris, Burslem; John Shenton, Robert H. Taylor, William Capper, Rupert Price, John Morris, Henry Hammersley, Elijah Boon, Henry Birch, Joseph Millward, James Kirkham, Samuel Leigh, James Kidd, Cobridge; Joseph Hancock, Henry Critchlow, Thomas Plant, James Green, Samuel Davies, Henry Stokes, Thomas Colcloagh, George Lear, Henry Bradshaw, Charles Hancock, Longport." The presents referred to were a very handsome coloured and engraved glass goblet, an engraved glass cigar-holder, and a china teacup and saucer painted in excellent style. Mr. Syson feelingly acknowledged the compliment."

The coloured and engraved goblet presented to Hiram was auctioned on 3 April 2019 (lot 26) by Martel Maides Auctions of Guernsey. It sold for £75 with another item, against an estimate of £100-£150.



The goblet presented to Hiram Syson on his forty-sixth birthday on 22 February 1879, auctioned on 3 April 2019.

Just a little over a year after the birthday presentation Hiram died on 7 June 1880 at the young age of forty-seven. He continued to work despite a severe and painful illness for about twelve months under the strain of looking after the town hall, running the fire brigade and the ambulance. The 1880 Annual Report of the Order paid homage to him as follows:

"The Serving Brother Hiram Syson, formally a non-commissioned officer in the 57th Foot, had been employed by the Corporation of Burslem for a long time in charge of the ambulance litter stationed there, and had devoted himself with the greatest interest to the duties devolving upon him in the conveyance of injured persons from various parts of the town to the Hospital; and in spite of a severe and painful illness extending over a period of twelve months, he did not relax his efforts to mitigate the pain of others, and his last report shows that his interest in his work continued to the latest day of his life."

Corbet Fletcher records in his Annals:

"The Burslem Station apparently closed down in 1880 on the death of its attendant Syson, whose last report, dated 12th June, 1880¹³, refers to a crushed patient being transported by him on a litter for a distance of five miles. From this Service originated in the following year the Ambulance Department of The Order, since it was placed under the supervision of Surgeon-Major W. G. N. Manley VC¹⁴ as Superintendent and in charge of a small Ambulance Committee which was responsible for its control and funds. The Potteries (Staffordshire) Centre of the Association was formed in 1884, and quickly became extensive and prosperous; and when in

¹³ This is an error – Hiram died on 7 June.

¹⁴ The Neuss Litter was briefly renamed the 'Neuss-Manley Litter', because it was Surgeon-Major (later Surgeon-General) Manley VC who, as head of the Order's Ambulance Department, was granted letters-patent by Queen Victoria to produce an 'improved' type of 'ambulance' or two-wheeled litter in December 1875.

1887 the Brigade was instituted it had several Ambulance Corps, including a Burslem Corps."



A St John Ambulance litter as used by the Metropolitan Police in about 1885 – courtesy of Ian Willis.

Hiram's funeral took place on Friday 11 June 1880, reported in the Staffordshire Sentinel:

"The remains of Mr H Syson, the superintendent of the fire brigade, and for several years keeper of the Town Hall in this town, were interred at the cemetery yesterday. Deceased who has served in the army for about twenty-one years, and was we understand, engaged in the Crimean War, has been ailing for some time past and expired on Monday evening. The funeral cortege was a very large one, including the mayor and members of the Corporation, the men of the fire brigade, the town clerk, Chief Superintendent Hill, Inspector German, sergeants of police, and a number of constables, thus showing the respect in which the deceased was held in the town."

Eliza remained in Burslem letting out rooms in her house at 19 Portland Street for one or two years before moving to St Annes-on-the-Sea in Lancashire to be with her Whittlesey family who had moved to St Annes from the cotton mill at Hareholme by 1881. The Tims family at Wood Street in St Annes and the Heap family at St Andrews Road South were near neighbours. Hiram and Eliza's daughter Ruth married Henry Heap, a builder, at St Annes in 1884. Eliza then went to live with her daughter and son in law at 55 St Andrews Road South where she died in 1929 at the age of eighty-nine years, having survived Hiram by almost fifty years!

Henry and Ruth had a son, named John Hiram after his grandfather, in 1885. John was followed in 1887 by Bertha, then Mary Dorothy in 1896. John married Elizabeth Ann Hallam in 1910. They do not seem to have had children.

Disaster struck on the night of 9 December 1886. Eliza's brother Charles was the Sub Coxswain (Mate) of the St lifeboat, the 'Laura Janet' and his younger brother Reuben was a volunteer crew member. On the night of 9 December 1886 the lifeboat was called out to a German barque, the 'Mexico', which during a tremendous gale ran aground on Horse Bank in the Ribble Estuary. Twenty-seven men, the entire crews of the Southport and St Annes lifeboats, including Charles and Reuben, were lost just off the Southport shore when the boats capsized in heavy seas¹⁵. Charles left a widow, Martha, and five young children; Reuben a widow Sarah and three little children including five month old Lizzie.

Ruth died in 1950, like her mother, at the age of eighty-nine years. Her son John Hiram Heap died on 5 July 1953. Hiram Syson's cranberry glass goblet (and other historical material) would have been taken to St Annes by Eliza, passed on to Ruth and then to her son John Hiram Heap. What may have happened to the goblet after John died in 1953 and how it reached Guernsey remains a mystery!

¹⁵ See Appendix B

Extract from James Gildea's 1881 'The Order of St John of Jerusalem in England and the St John Ambulance Association' Including images of Hiram Syson and the Burslem ambulance.

THE "ST. JOHN" TWO-WHEELED LITTER.

The want of some organisation for the aid of sufferers by accidents, &c.—which are of frequent occurrence, especially in the mining and colliery districts—has long been felt. The members of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, desirous of carrying out their motto *pro utilitate hominum*, have had under their consideration some means of remedying this want. It occurred to them that the introduction of a light ambulance litter, for the removal of persons who were injured by accidents, would tend very much to alleviate their sufferings.

In the mining and colliery districts, where accidents are frequent, these litters are of the greatest use, and the benefits which they confer has been proved on many occasions at places where they are stationed.

Valuable testimony to the usefulness of these ambulances is afforded by the following extract from a "Report on the removal of persons suffering from infectious diseases," by the late Dr. Hardwicke, coroner for Middlesex :—

"I am of opinion that the best vehicle yet known for the removal of sick and injured persons is that introduced by the English Branch of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, invented by Mr. Neuss, of Berlin. It runs on two wheels, combines all the advantages of a litter and a carriage, may be unclosed, and an attendant can accompany the occupant. These vehicles can be taken to houses, upstairs, and into bedrooms for the patient, which is an immense advantage."

The following extracts also are taken from a few of the letters which have been received from other sources :

John Alcock, Esq., Surgeon, of the North Staffordshire Infirmary, **Burslem**, writes :—

"I have much pleasure in stating that I saw the ambulance made use of the other day in conveying a patient suffering from compound fracture of the leg to his own home, and that I was

much struck with its efficiency and simplicity. The man also stated that he was carried from the scene of the accident without suffering the least pain."

J. M. Taylor, Esq., L.R.C.P. (London), **Burslem**, writes :—

"I am very glad to be able to speak favourably of the ambulance litter which, through the benevolence of the Order of St. John, has been introduced into this town. Of the efficiency of the litter there can be no doubt, and in a place like this where the Infirmary is some miles away, its usefulness is very great."

J. W. Powell, Esq., Clerk to the Local Board of Health, **Burslem**, writes :—

"In my annual report to the Board I refer to the fact of their having accepted the charge of the ambulance litter, and state that it has already done good service by alleviating suffering in a number of cases of accident."

But it is not only in mining and colliery districts that the members of the Order of St. John hope to see their ambulances introduced. In all large towns, where street accidents are common, and building is going on, they will be found most useful. Also in every establishment in which many persons are employed, and in which either the nature of the occupation followed, or of the machinery in use, entails risk of accidents and injuries, there might be an ambulance provided for dealing efficiently with these casualties when they may happen. Even in rural districts, where accidents are less frequent, an ambulance could be stationed at some central place to convey any who might meet with accidents to the nearest hospitals, or to their homes; thus sparing injured persons an immense aggravation of the suffering usually experienced at such times by the manner of removal now employed.

From the facility with which the litter can be thoroughly disinfected, it is peculiarly well adapted for the conveyance of those suffering from contagious and infectious diseases.

The Order of St. John trusts that in the course of time these ambulances will come into general use throughout the country. They can be supplied by the Order at £16 each; but no pecuniary advantage is derived from their sale; the sole object the Order has in view is to make more generally known, and to bring

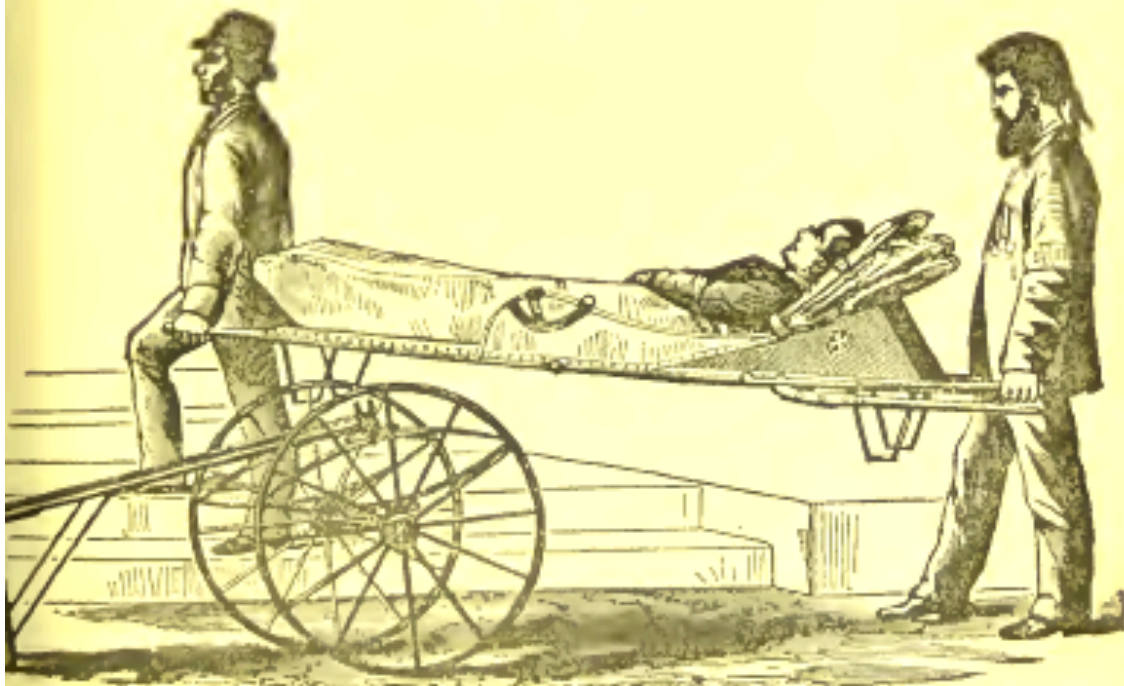
into more general use, so inexpensive a means of diminishing suffering.

After the first cost the expense is very small. Nothing is required beyond the trifling cost of occasional re-painting, and repair if damaged. The litter should be placed in charge of some trustworthy person, who would see that it was safely housed and kept in good order, always ready for use. It would be well for this person to be thoroughly conversant with its construction, and to know how to use it without delay in any case when it might be required.

Among the places where the "St. John" Two-wheeled Litter is to be found, in addition to over fifty Metropolitan Police Stations, the following may be mentioned, viz. :—

Aberdare	Newcastle-on-Tyne
Alma Colliery (Chesterfield)	Nine-Elms Station
Barnsley	North Woolwich
Birkenhead	Norwich
Blackheath	Oxford
Burslem	Pilsley Colliery
Camborne	Pontypridd
Camberwell	Purton
Cannock	Shipley Colliery
Carlisle	Southampton
Clay Cross	Stafford
East and West India Docks	Stockton-on-Tees
Esher	Stoke-upon-Trent
Eton	Sunderland
Halifax	Surrey Commercial Docks
Jersey	Swanwick Colliery
Liverpool	Swinton
London Docks	Sydenham
Maidstone	Tenby
Manchester	Warrington
Mansfield	Westminster Union
Margate	Westward Ho!
Monkwearmouth	Woolwich (Royal Arsenal)
Monmouth	Worcester
Morfa Colliery	

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE "ST JOHN" TWO-WHEELED
LITTER.



PRICE £16.

The weight of the Litter complete is—

Stretcher and frame together	149 lbs.
Stretcher detached from frame	70½ „

The Mexico Disaster

This rescue remains the worst loss of crew in a single incident in RNLI history and was viewed as a national disaster across Victorian England.

The Mexico, a 400 ton Hamburg barque, left Liverpool on 5 December 1886 bound for Guayaquil, Ecuador. Four days later she was caught in a violent gale and amidst heavy seas and snow showers she ran aground on the perilous sandbanks in the Ribble Estuary near Southport. Lifeboats were launched from Lytham, St Annes and Southport to rescue the stranded crew.

Eliza Fernley from Southport and Laura Janet from St Annes were the first lifeboats to launch. Tragically, they both capsized during the rescue attempt and 27 of the 29 crew were drowned. A third lifeboat, Charles Biggs, launched on its maiden rescue, saved the Mexico's 12 crew members.

Southport's Eliza Fernley was the first lifeboat to be launched in response to the Mexico's distress signals. As the Eliza Fernley reached the stricken vessel the rough seas and terrible gale capsized her. Only 2 of the 16 crew survived, Henry Robinson and John Jackson, who had been trapped under the boat after it overturned. They survived by clinging to the keel of the boat and swimming back to shore to raise the alarm. Two hours later the lifeboat was found washed up at Birkdale.

Twenty minutes after the Eliza Fernley was called out, the Laura Janet from St Annes was launched. It never reached the Mexico and was found ashore the following morning – the entire crew had been lost. As there were no survivors it has never been clear exactly what happened to the Laura Janet.

A third lifeboat, the Charles Biggs, was launched on her maiden rescue to assist the crew of the Mexico. After

shattering 3 oars and being filled numerous times with water, the Lytham crew, in their new vessel, miraculously reached the stricken ship. By this point the Mexico had settled on her beam ends and her crew had strapped themselves to the rigging. The Charles Biggs rowed for a mile and a half to reach the Mexico and successfully rescued all 12 crew members.



The RNLI lifeboat 'Laura Janet' at its launch in 1885.

This was the worst disaster in RNLI history; 27 men lost, leaving 16 widows and 50 children without fathers. A public appeal was launched to support those widowed and orphaned by the tragedy. Donations were received from Queen Victoria and Kaiser Wilhelm. The money raised also went towards memorials to commemorate the lifeboatmen lost at sea. Six memorials were erected, including on the promenade at St Annes, Duke Street Cemetery in Southport and St Cuthbert's Church in Lytham, which still stands today. On 23 May 1888 the Lifeboat Monument was unveiled in St Annes to commemorate the bravery of these crews.

The crew of the Laura Janet lost on the night of 9/10 December 1886:

William Johnson, 35 (Coxswain)
Charles Tims, 43 (2nd Coxswain)
Oliver Hodson, 39 (Bowman)
James Bonney, 21
Nicholas Parkinson, 22
Richard Fisher, 45
James Johnson, 45
John P Wignall 22
Reuben Tims, 30
Thomas Parkinson 28,
Thomas Bonney, 35
James Dobson, 23
James Harrison, 19

Adapted from and thanks to:

<https://www.lythamstannesartcollection.org/the-mexico-disaster-of-1886.html>



The memorial to Charles and Reuben Tims, and 4 other crew members, in St Annes Churchyard.

Charles Tims – brother of Eliza Syson

Pictured in GI & JE Mayes book "On a Broad Reach -
– The History of the St Anne's-on-the-Sea Lifeboat
Station 1881-1925



Fisherman, boatman and lifeboatman, Charles Tims, the brother of the authors' great-grandmother, Phoebe, was the LAURA JANET's only sub-coxswain. Appointed on July 1881, he drowned along with the rest of the crew, including his younger brother Reuben, on the night of 9/10 December 1886. (Mayes family)

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